DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 424 014 PS 026 985

AUTHOR Johnson, Suzanne Clark; Baratka, Talley V.; Wood, Lisa
TITLE Quality Child Care in Virginia. Critical Issues in Child Care. White Paper 1.
INSTITUTION Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth, Richmond.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Caregivers; *Day Care; *Day Care Effects; Early Childhood Education; Economically Disadvantaged; Parent Participation; *Program Improvement; Training
IDENTIFIERS Child Care Costs; Child Care Needs; *Day Care Quality; Virginia

ABSTRACT

This paper on child care is one of four to be published by the Action Alliance for Virginia's Children. The papers are based on the most comprehensive data available on child care in Virginia, recent scholarly research from both social science and neuroscience, and the best judgment of leading professionals in the fields of education and child development. This paper asserts that high-quality child care is not a luxury, but rather a requirement if Virginia's children are going to grow up healthy, ready to learn, and able to interact successfully with other people. The paper states that high standards, well-educated and well-compensated staff, and strong involvement of parents are as key to quality in early childhood education and care as they are for older children in formal school settings. Topics covered by the paper include: (1) research on early childhood programs, school success, and social adjustment; (2) impact of quality child care on economics; (3) quality child care and disadvantaged children; (4) lack of quality early childhood programs; (5) myths regarding child care; (6) what is quality child care? (including discussions of staff-child ratios, staff qualifications, and the vital role of parents); and (7) licensing and accreditation. The paper concludes with eight recommendations for improving child care, including increasing support from various public and private sectors for quality enhancements, especially higher wages and benefits for providers, and coordinating and streamlining licensing regulations. (EV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 424 014

PS 026985

CRITICAL ISSUES IN CHILD CARE

White Paper 1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Quality Child Care in Virginia

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lisa Wood

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

ACTION ALLIANCE FOR VIRGINIA'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH

KIDS COUNT IN VIRGINIA

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This Critical Issues in Child Care white paper is one of a series of four, aimed at promoting the goals of the KIDS COUNT in Virginia project of the Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth.

KIDS COUNT in Virginia monitors changing trends that affect the well-being of young people in the Commonwealth. In addition to this series of publications, KIDS COUNT in Virginia produces an annual data book and maintains an Internet website to provide Virginians with measurable information about the realities of the lives of children and youth in their communities.

The Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth is the statewide, nonprofit, non-partisan, multi-issue organization advocating for children in the Commonwealth. Good policies for children and wise decisions to implement these policies must be based on accurate, objective information. Providing, interpreting, and disseminating that information is the function of KIDS COUNT in Virginia-and the purpose of this series of white papers on Critical Issues in Child Care. The Action Alliance also is coordinating a statewide coalition on child care that will direct its efforts toward improving conditions faced by children and their families who need child care in the Commonwealth.

The Action Alliance currently focuses on three priority topics: the support of parents/families; early childhood development, education, and care; and the prevention of violence. Supported by private funding, the Action Alliance is a membership organization governed by a board of directors from throughout Virginia.

For more information on the Action Alliance, membership, the child care coalition, or KIDS COUNT in Virginia, contact:

The Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth
422 East Franklin Street, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219
Phone: 804-649-0184 FAX: 804-649-0161
E-mail: aavcy@erols.com or HN5071@handsnet.org

Produced by the Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth
Suzanne Clark Johnson, Ph.D.
Talley V. Baratka, M.S.
Lisa Wood

Data collection and research provided by Joseph Galano, Ph.D., and John B. Nezlek, Ph.D., of the Applied Social Psychology Research Institute of the College of William & Mary.

Special thanks to:
Peg Spangenthal
Virginia Department of Social Services
Altavista Area YMCA (for photographs)
YMCA of South Hampton Roads (for photographs)

Before you read this white paper, flip through the pages and look at the faces of the children. These are Virginia's children who benefit from a quality early childhood program which, because of strong public and private support, is affordable and accessible to all children within their community.

Think of other children whose faces must haunt any discussion of child care in Virginia. Think of a six-month-old languishing in a crib waiting for his overburdened caregiver to attend to his needs after she changes the diapers or gives the bottle to the three other infants in her care. The six-month-old is generally silent, not from contentment, but because his cries and coos have largely gone unnoticed over the weeks of his young life.

Think of the five preschoolers at the family daycare provider's home who spend several hours each morning and each afternoon watching cartoons on television or marking in coloring books. The provider has no training in child development or the group care of children. She is kind-hearted but unskilled in providing stimulating activities that meet children's needs. Caring for five children plus her own family stretches her time and energy. Television at least keeps the children quiet and occupied.

Think of the child who is closest to your heart. What kind of child care would you want for that child?

This white paper unequivocally advocates for quality child care for all these children. As you read the results of research studies, picture the children. Translate the numbers of the data into the faces of Virginia's youngest citizens. Child care policy is complex, the finances intricate, the sometimes conflicting needs of working parents and developing children puzzling. The purpose of this paper is to make a reasoned argument based on the best scientific and statistical information available. In the midst of the politics and economics, we must not lose sight of the children.

The Commonwealth of Virginia is justifiably proud of its system of higher education—its public colleges and universities are among the finest in the United States. Amidst a sometimes fractious political climate, there is bipartisan agreement that the education of our children in kindergarten through twelfth grade is one of the most important responsibilities of government and its citizens.

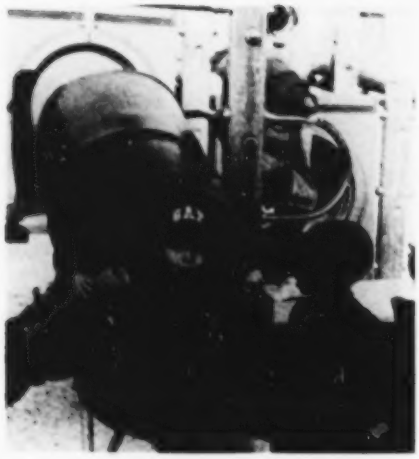
In contrast, Virginia's early childhood programs, which provide essential care and education for children from birth until they enter formal school, are labeled "mediocre" by the most recent national ranking.[1] *As the importance of the early years of children's lives is increasingly documented by scientific research, Virginia's failure to commit to excellence for the care and education of its most vulnerable citizens is foolish policy and bankrupt economics.*

"What is it really like to be an infant who cannot turn over without assistance or who cannot ask for food or drink? What is it like to be a bored toddler with no power to relieve that boredom? What is it like to be a young child grieving the loss of yet another caregiver whom she has just come to trust with her affection? As adults we can only use our imagination and sensitivity to try to enter and to understand the world of the young child.

"To be a responsive advocate means that one must try to listen with the heart to those silent voices of the children even while surrounded by the seeming dissonance of all the other voices. When the world is right for our children, it will be right for the rest of us as well."[a]

The University of Virginia is the highest ranked state university in the country.[b]

The character of a people is shown most clearly by the way it treats the most vulnerable in their midst.



The Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth is committed to improving the well-being of our youngest citizens. As advocates, we are pleading on behalf of the Commonwealth's future, its children. We are asking citizens to speak to their leaders and to use their own resources, to businesses to remember that the children of their employees will become the workforce of the future, and to government to protect its most vulnerable citizens.

Knowledge is power—or, at least, knowledge can be power—when used by citizens who care. With a belief in the citizens of the Commonwealth and our leaders in the public and private sectors, the Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth is publishing a series of four white papers on child care in Virginia. The four topics are:

- **Quality Child Care**
- **Affordability and Accessibility of Child Care**
- **The Business Community as Partners of Child Care**
- **An Overview and Plan for Improvement of Child Care**

The child care white papers will:

- improve Virginians' knowledge of early childhood programs in the Commonwealth;
- inspire a stronger commitment to improve child care in Virginia; and
- strengthen the collective voices who are speaking on behalf of children.

The first three papers, based on the most comprehensive (albeit limited) data on child care in Virginia, recent scholarly research from both social science and neuroscience, and the best judgment of leading professionals in the fields of education and child development, will analyze the critical issues of quality, affordability, accessibility, and the role of business. The last white paper, *An Overview and Plan for Improvement*, will summarize the data and policies on child care in Virginia, identify both successful models and unmet needs, and advocate for a multi-faceted plan to improve early childhood programs in the Commonwealth.

In researching this paper and the topic of child care, it was difficult to find data that had been collected at the state level; it is hoped that this project will help spotlight the need for reliable information collected regularly about Virginia's child care efforts.

There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.[C]

The quality of child care matters.

Quality child care is not a luxury but rather a requirement if Virginia's children are going to grow up healthy, ready to learn, and able to interact successfully with other people.

The Commonwealth has recently increased its commitment to quality formal education in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Adopting stringent standards of learning, hiring more teachers so that especially younger students can have more individual attention, improving the training of prospective teachers and paying them higher wages, and increasing accountability to parents and to government have received bipartisan support in state government and from citizens across the Commonwealth. No one would argue that if our school age children are just kept safe, the Commonwealth has met its educational responsibilities.

Those same values must extend to early childhood programs in the Commonwealth. High standards, well educated and well compensated staff, and strong involvement of parents are as key to quality in early childhood education and care, as they are for older children in formal school settings.

Today more than ever, the quality of child care in Virginia is important. More Virginia children, including more than 330,100 children younger than six, are in child care full-time or part-time. Three out of four young children—and half of all children younger than three—spend all or part of their day being cared for by someone other than their parents. This includes an estimated 39,000 babies younger than one year of age.[2]

Because of technological breakthroughs that have allowed researchers to track the structures of the brain with detail previously unimaginable, we also know more about the development of young children. The widely publicized new brain research only confirms what many parents and early childhood professionals have known for years. The first five years of life are critical for launching a child's intellectual, emotional, and social potential. Kindergarten is not the starting point of a child's brain development. By kindergarten, the process is half over.[3]

The brain research also defines the kind of early experiences that are most important. Sensitive interactions between a child and a loving adult are pivotal. This happens when an adult has time to talk and play with a child, follow the child's lead, and be sensitive to the child's timing, interests, and needs. Such simple but often overlooked activities as talking and singing with a young child are literally the building blocks of young minds.

Leaders throughout the country have increasingly realized the importance and effectiveness of concentrating on the needs of young children. Fifteen governors have led their states to initiatives focusing on the early years. Virginia does not yet have such an initiative.

Governor Jim Hunt of North Carolina said, "During my first two terms as governor, I tried to reform our public schools to ensure that our children would succeed. It was a frustrating task. After two terms, I worked for eight years in the corporate sector. That's when I realized that, if our children were going to prosper in school, we needed to start at the very beginning. If we ensure that our children prosper during their first five years, they will be much more likely to succeed once they enter formal schooling."[4] Hunt, with bipartisan support of the state legislature, launched the Smart Start initiative to improve the quality of programs and services for children in their early years. The improvements are varied and individually tailored to the needs of each locality. In some counties, the most pressing need is attracting a pediatrician or providing dental services; in others, it may be a combination of incentives for training of child care staff and other measurable ways to increase quality child care.

Because increasing numbers of children spend many hours in early childhood programs each week, the quality of child care has a major impact on the quality of a child's first years. Children enter child care as young as six weeks old and, if their parents are employed full-time, may be in child care 45-50 hours per week, 50 weeks a year.

Although important, child care is not the most critical influence on the quality of a child's early experiences. Parents and the home environment are central. The child's neighborhood and immediate community also impact the child's early development. Nevertheless, the quality of child care has a significant impact on the majority of children who receive care and education outside the home.

Despite their various names—preschool, nursery school, daycare, or child care—any attempt to separate early childhood programs into those providing education and those

providing care is based on a false assumption. As young children learn through interaction with people and objects, every setting is educational. Because basic caregiving activities—eating, resting, toileting—consume a large part of a child's day, education and care for young children cannot be split. Indeed, children require a nurturing and stimulating environment in order to flourish.

As child care has become more important for children and families over the last 20 years, research has become increasingly rigorous. In a detailed 1995 review of the research, The Packard Foundation reported, "The results of the methodologically strongest studies in a very vast literature indicate that early childhood programs can have substantial effects on children's lives years after their involvement in the program." Based on the long-term outcomes of early childhood programs, the authors found large and persistent benefits for children in their intellectual achievements (their success in school) and in their social development. For example, early childhood programs have been found to enhance children's school achievement and future earnings, and decrease involvement with the criminal justice system. There is an important caveat. Such results are only found in *good quality* education and care programs. Indeed, poor quality programs are associated with children being delayed in language and reading skills and displaying more aggression toward other children and adults.[5]

What do studies show about school success?

A review of 36 studies of the impact of quality early childhood programs "constitute overwhelming evidence that early childhood education can produce sizable improvements in school success" especially reducing grade retention and placement in remedial special education programs.[6] For example, the Consortium on Longitudinal Studies found that by the time children had reached seventh grade, 14% of those who had attended preschool versus 35% of children who did not attend preschool had been placed in special education.[7] Later studies have also found that participants in quality early childhood programs are more likely to graduate from high school.[8] The most frequently found effects related to school success involve children's language development. Quality early childhood programs have consistently been shown to increase children's language development, including specifically their ability to understand language and their talkativeness.[9] Experience in quality early childhood programs is also associated with higher scores on tests of cognitive abilities,[10] good adjustment to school,[11] and task orientation.[12] Some research found IQ gains of approximately eight points immediately after completion of the early childhood program. The IQ advantage usually persisted until school entry, but evened out later on. While the IQ measure

How good is the research on early childhood programs?

Since 1970, there has been an increasingly steady stream of research evaluating early childhood programs. Early studies focused on one particular type of child (e.g., poor children) in one type of program. Over the years, research models have gotten more sophisticated. The most recent studies look at diverse children in different types of child care settings (family daycare, preschools, and child care centers) of variable quality. Indicators of quality include global measures, specific attributes (often those usually included in licensing requirements, such as group size, staff qualifications, and staff:child ratios), as well as observational measures of staff and children's behavior. The best recent studies also evaluate family variables, recognizing the many factors that impact a child's development. Several research studies have been going on long enough to be able to review effects of program participation even into adulthood, following such variables as earnings and high school dropout rates.[d]

In the 1995-96 school year, 16,008 Virginia children in grades K-6 were retained (not promoted to the next grade), and a total of 50,056 children were retained in all grades, K-12.[e]

Nine percent of Virginia's teens (16-19 year olds) are high school dropouts.[f]

has been criticized as relatively unimportant, robust effects have also been found on the more substantive measures of reading performance, not being promoted to the next grade, and special education placement.[13]

High quality programs consistently show benefits that go beyond IQ. Child development specialists have tried to identify why attending quality preschool programs affects children's school success in the early grades with continued long-term benefits. Entwisle suggested that "preschool may change children directly by building their skills or bolstering their abilities and it may affect them indirectly by changing the beliefs or expectations of the people who surround the children. . .. Those who enter school with the socio-emotional maturity that teachers expect are positioned to benefit from the opportunities for growth offered them in the first grade."[14]

In the large-scale study, *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers*, Heilburn argued, "Good child care can help children enter school ready to succeed in a number of ways, and have a particularly strong impact on low-income and other children who are at greater risk for school failure. For example, a recently released study found children in higher quality preschool classrooms display greater receptive language ability and pre-math skills . . . [,] have more advanced social skills than those in lower quality classrooms, and have better relationships with their teachers and more positive self-perceptions. Good care has an even greater impact on the language skills and self-perception of children who are considered to be at-risk of school failure."[g]

In other words, quality early childhood programs improve children's ability to think and reason as they enter school, enabling them to learn more in early grades. Even if their IQ advantage (compared to their peers) disappears, their learning accumulates, and their academic success keeps them on track toward high school graduation. Also important is the child's increased motivation and the support provided by parents and teachers once their expectations for the child's school success rise. The child gains confidence and becomes oriented toward school achievement as parents and teachers encourage the child's learning.[15]

Children in quality early childhood programs typically have stronger cognitive and social readiness skills. Entering school ready to learn, these children may be put in one of the higher reading groups or get the teachers' attention in positive rather than negative ways. That positive start in formal school may follow the child all the way through school and even later.[16]

What do studies show about social adjustment?

Thirty-eight percent of fourth grade students in Virginia scored below basic mathematics levels in 1996. Thirty percent of Virginia sixth graders in 1996 failed to pass at least one of the three Literacy passport tests.[h]

The impact of quality programs on children's behavior and relationships is obvious through observations of children in diverse quality programs. Such effects are found even with toddlers[17] who scored higher on measures of social competence, were more compliant, and could better resist temptation to do what had been forbidden by their teachers. Preschoolers showed more cooperation; less inappropriately dependent behavior; less aggression, hyperactivity, and anxiety; and more consideration and sociability.[18]

In 1990, 9.9% of Virginians (18 years and older) read at less than a ninth grade level.[i]

Several longitudinal studies have found long-term results on the social well-being of children who were in high quality early childhood programs. In the Syracuse study, high quality programs until age five reduced the risk of delinquency ten

"The effect of early intervention on school success is well documented. I believe that early intervention therapy, language stimulation and rich experiences at ages three and four will do more to increase the achievement of at-risk children and to reduce the dropout rate than any amount of money spent at grades 7-12."

— a school superintendent [i]

years later by 90%. Only six percent had gotten in trouble and were on probation, and those were for minor offenses. This contrasts with the control group, where 22% were on probation for serious offenses. The Perry Preschool program reported that because of much improved delinquency rates for preschool participants (those children assigned to quality preschool programs with home visits to help support parents reduced the risk of growing up to become chronic lawbreakers by 80%), there was $150,000 per child in criminal justice savings alone.[19] A review of four studies of quality early childhood programs found that the demonstration of the long-term effects on crime and anti-social behavior indicated higher quality, and the most successful ones combined program quality with family support services. (Family support services without the early childhood component, however, were found to be less effective.)[20]

Impact of Quality Child Care on Economics

"If we're ready to guarantee free room and board in a prison cell to a criminal, shouldn't we be just as ready to guarantee a slot in a Head Start program to an innocent, developing toddler? Shouldn't we be as ready to guarantee Early Head Start to infants as we are to guarantee a long stay in prison to a chronic violent offender?"

— George Sweat, Chief of Police, Winston-Salem, NC [k]

Early childhood programs can result in significant cost savings in both the short and long term. For example, a study of the short-term impact of a Colorado program found that it reduced special education costs by $4.7 million in just three years. A study of the long-term impact of the Perry Preschool program found that after 27 years, each $1 invested saved more than $7 by increasing the likelihood that children would be literate, employed, and enrolled in postsecondary education and making them less likely to be school dropouts, dependent on welfare, or arrested for criminal activity or delinquency.[21]

The cost effectiveness of investing in early childhood education is especially clear when poor children are involved. The national cost of failing to provide at least two years of quality early childhood education is extremely high, on the order of $100,000 for each child born into poverty, or $400 billion for all poor children under five today.[22]

Quality Child Care and Disadvantaged Children

"Today's inadequate investments in the early childhood development and after-school programs leave us stuck on a treadmill, running faster and faster to put people in jail while kids are turned into criminals faster than we can lock them up."

— Elliot L. Richardson, former US Attorney General [l]

While quality early childhood programs have been found to benefit all children, without question the positive effects are most significant for children whose home environments are relatively poor.[23] As approximately one out of every six children in America comes from a family in poverty (below the poverty line of approximately $16,100 for a family of 4), and one in 16 from extreme poverty (below 50% of poverty),[24] the impact of this finding is significant. Despite their greater need, poor children are less likely than children from middle-class families to be cared for in high quality child care settings and more likely to be in low quality, home-based or informal

"Child care and after-school programs are public safety issues," says Sanford A. Newman, President of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. "Studies prove that quality early childhood care and after-school programs are some of our most powerful weapons against crime today and tomorrow, because we get kids off to the right start and teach them value and skills they need to become good neighbors instead of criminals. There is no government responsibility more fundamental than protecting the public safety."[23]

Arlington County Police Chief Edward A. Flynn, one of more than 17 police chiefs, sheriffs, and prosecutors calling for the state and federal governments to increase support for quality educational child care programs for preschoolers and after school, called such programs "smart spending. They can save us billions of tax dollars that might otherwise be spent on imprisoning offenders and the other costs related to crime."[24]

It is very difficult to intervene successfully at age four when a child has spent three years in a poor quality setting. "If we as a nation do not find ways to provide developmentally appropriate experiences for the numerous infants and toddlers who are in child care, we will certainly pay the price later on."[25]

In Virginia in 1996, 32% of school students were approved for free or reduced-price lunches. (This indicates how many school age children come from low-income families.)[26]

arrangements that are often inadequate in quality.[25]

Goelman and Pence compared children from high- and low-resource families. The data strongly suggested that children from low-resource families (e.g., families headed by single mothers with low levels of education, occupation, and income) tended to be disproportionately enrolled in low-quality family daycare situations. In a small study of very low-income mothers in Richmond, of those with children in some type of child care, only 15% were in some form of formal care, such as Head Start, care in a non-relative's home, or child care center.[26]

In what they called "the ominous flip side" of the finding that the combination of positive home and child care influences combined to optimize the healthy development of middle-income children, researchers found a significant number of children have "the worst of both worlds." They come from low-resource families and attend low quality family child care.[27]

Lack of Quality Early Childhood Programs

Despite strong, consistent research that underscores the importance of quality early childhood programs of both short- and long-term benefits for America's children and the cost savings attached to early intervention and prevention, there is a serious shortage of quality child care in the United States. According to the Carnegie Corporation, child care and early education services in the United States "have so long been neglected that they now constitute some of the worst services for children in Western society." The care most children receive not only can "threaten their immediate health and safety, but also can compromise their long-term development."[28]

The 1995 study, *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers*, and the 1994 *Study of Children in Family Day Care* found most child care in America is inadequate and some is dangerous. Conducted in a variety of states, these studies used a wide variety of measures including health and safety evaluations, the presence of materials to promote healthy development, provider-child interactions, and activities.

Inadequate care in these studies is care that does not meet basic health and safety standards and may be harmful to children. Infants and toddlers are disproportionately (an estimated 35-40% of our nation's youngest) in such care, and they are particularly vulnerable.[29]

Parents' concerns bear out the research studies, although parents' satisfaction levels tend to be higher than researchers' standards of quality. (Some argue that because parents must

depend on child care in order to go to their jobs, it is very difficult for most parents to admit that they are leaving their children in inadequate care.)[30] A variety of recent polls reflect parents' dissatisfaction. In a survey of parents in Fairfax County, two-thirds of all households that use or need to find child care for work- or school-related reasons experienced some problem with child care in the past year. That represents 32,800 Virginia households. Twenty percent of the families (10,600) had problems with the quality of care.[31] In an October 1997 *Parents' Magazine* survey, more than 50% of parents said they worried every week whether their children are getting what they need in child care, and 50-60% reported having a very bad experience with child care. One in four said child care was not as good as he or she would like it to be.[32] A group of low-income mothers reported that they frequently worried about the quality of care they can find, especially mothers of the youngest children.[33]

In Virginia, 20% of children under age 13 live in low-income families with working parents.[9]

LICENSED/REGULATED CARE IN VIRGINIA, AS OF FEBRUARY 1998

Child Day Centers	2,223
Family Day Homes	1,751
Church-exempt	673
Short-term Day	131

(No distinction between for-profit and nonprofit)

Information provided by the Division of Licensing, Virginia Department of Social Services

While parents express concern over their children's care, and research points unequivocally to its importance, the pursuit of quality early child care remains controversial in Virginia. The effort to improve the quality of child care is hampered by some persistent myths and misunderstandings.

Myth #1: Child care is unrelated to a child's education.

"Too often . . . child care is viewed as entirely separate from, instead of the foundation for, a child's education."[34]

"Child care is more than a place where parents can safely leave their children during the workday. As a vital part of the nation's education system, it is a place where our youngest children can begin to develop the fundamental skills that allow them to become lifelong learners and productive workers and citizens."[35]

"Children are always learning—whether in the care of teachers at school or in the care of parents, relatives, or nonrelatives at home, family child care homes, or child care centers. One cannot turn off and on a child's mind so that only in certain settings children are learning. . .. We must realize that child care forms a major portion of the early education system in this country."[36]

Myth #2: Quality is a luxury issue in child care.

Pressures to expand supply and depress costs "have consistently shortchanged efforts to improve the quality of child care in the United States. Costs, rather than the well-

"A detailed, critical review of research [shows] pubic investments in quality, early childhood care and education can produce important long-term improvements in the intellectual and social development of disadvantaged children. Unfortunately, because the United States underinvests in both the quality and quantity of early care and education, the nation foregoes many of the potential benefits at an annual cost in millions of dollars." [7]

being of children, have shaped our public policies about child care."[37] Yet, a 20-year history of research makes a strong case for the developmental value of investing in good quality care, not just any child care.[38]

Sharon Lynn Kagan, Senior Associate at Yale University's Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, insists that "mediocre services may meet adult needs to have a place to put their child so they can go to work, but it does not address children's needs. . .. Child care and early childhood education deserve not to be done on the cheap."[39]

Myth #3: Child care is "baby-sitting."

"Some people underestimate the added health, safety, and developmental problems that are introduced when a group of children is in child care. There seems to be a tendency to assume that any home is safe and that any provider who has been a mother is adequately prepared to care for a group of children—assumptions that are not borne out by experience."[40]

Myth #4: Children should stay home with their parents. Child care is harmful.

The question of whether or not children should be in child care is obsolete. Twenty years of research indicates that quality child care is not harmful, but indeed may actually help children, especially those from low-income families.[41] Most parents do not have the choice about whether or not to put their children in child care. The financial demands of the family require that they work.

Most mothers in Virginia work to help support their families. About 64% of Virginia mothers with children younger than six and 78% of women with children 6-17 are in the labor force. [5]

For many mothers, employment is not optional. Nationally, the majority (55%) of working women provide half or more of their household income, about half the families with young children earn less than $35,000 per year, and one out of three children of working mothers are poor or would be poor if their mothers weren't employed.[1]

"Parents have primary responsibility for their children and parents should have the resources to provide the best care. Parents who are working should be able to choose the type and quality of care they think is best for their child, and caregivers should have the support and resources they need to provide quality care. Ideally, parents who work outside the home should have a variety of choices in choosing reliable, quality child care that meets their needs including care given by relatives, neighbors, child care centers, and neighborhood day care homes. Children in all child care settings deserve a safe and healthy environment that is conducive to learning."[42]

Myth #5: Quality is really a code word for trying to limit parents' choices and tell them by whom

and where their children must be cared for and to dictate a curriculum.

Location or sponsorship of a child care program does not make the critical difference in whether children are receiving what they need.[43] A variety of curricula are equally effective in preparing children for school.[44] Although generally center-based care has been found to be of higher quality than regulated family daycare, and regulated family daycare has been found to be of higher quality than unregulated or relative care, there are certainly exceptions. Quality care is provided in every setting and inadequate care is provided in every setting. The setting alone does not make the difference.

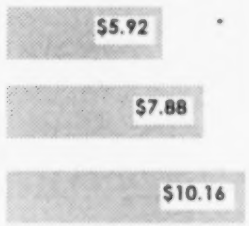
The common factor in high quality care is "developmentally appropriate," that is, education that takes full account of what we know about the way children learn.[45] No one factor defines quality or developmentally appropriate. It is a combination of the physical environment, the activities the child experiences, the quality of the staff/child interactions, and the stability of care. High quality early childhood programs typically have a number of good things right about the program; conversely, low quality programs typically are deficient in multiple ways.

What is quality child care?

Summarizing the findings from 20 years of increasingly sophisticated research, Frede said that the core issue is "all quality programs increased the contact between teachers and children and gave the teachers greater knowledge about the children in their care, permitting the teachers to meet each child's individual needs . . .. Consistent across every program was an emphasis on language. The teachers provided a model of standard English and the programs encouraged children to talk and be understood, to understand the speech of others, and to use language to express ideas and symbolic concepts."[46] In a landmark 1995 study of child care centers, researchers found, "What makes the most important difference is whether a warm or *sensitive* and an attentive or *responsive* relationship exists between the teacher/provider and the children. Also important: discipline as teaching of social skills rather than punishing bad behavior; whether teachers' actions and instructions are developmentally appropriate; and whether care is stable. It is these elements of quality that have been shown to affect a child's intellectual, social, and emotional development."[47]

Because relationships between the child, the parent, and the caregiver are so crucial, if the other quality factors are in place, it is important that there is a low turnover rate of staff so that all three partners can develop stable connections.

1996 median hourly wages in Virginia of child care workers and preschool teachers compared to the median hourly wage of all workers



— reprinted from the *1998 National KIDS COUNT Data Book*

Virginians typically pay the people who care for their children half the hourly wage they pay the people who care for their cars.[U]

Stability of care is a complex issue. Staff turnover rates are extremely high. For example, Fairfax County reported that more than one out of three (35%) family child care providers go out of business each year. A turnover rate of 41% or higher for child care staff is not unusual, compared to the national turnover rate for public school teachers of only 6.6%. Low wages for child care staff are closely linked to the rapid turnover rates. In 1996, child care providers in Virginia made a median hourly wage of $5.92 an hour, preschool teachers made $7.88 an hour, while the average hourly income of all workers was $10.16. Typically, child care providers have few—if any—benefits, such as paid vacation, paid sick days, or health insurance.[48]

Such personal, relationship-based aspects of quality care have consistently been shown to be related to more structural aspects of programs, including factors that can be regulated by licensing requirements. What kinds of licensing requirements are related to quality child care? The following attributes are important, not in and of themselves, but because they usually make possible the kind of staff:child interactions described above.

Staff:Child Ratios—The fewer children for each teacher, the more individual attention the child can receive; for example, the teacher has a greater opportunity to respond playfully to an infant's babbling, to ask questions that help a preschooler figure things out, and to watch out for basic health and safety issues for children. In Virginia, a caregiver in a child care center is allowed to care for as many as 10 two-year-olds and 15 four-year-olds, although early childhood experts recommend no more than 4-6 two-year-olds and no more than 8-10 four-year-olds.

Closely related to staff:child ratios is the total size of the group of children. Research has shown that even when the correct ratios are maintained, the relationships of staff with children usually deteriorate in larger groups. Virginia does not limit group size at all.[49]

Virginia also does not require licensing or regulating for family day care homes where there are fewer than six children in care. The caregiver's own children are not included in the total number of children allowed.

Staff Qualifications—Several aspects of staff education are especially important. Does the caregiver have good language skills so that children can hear correct grammar and enriched language patterns? Can the staff member

communicate clear messages and share ideas verbally with children? Does the staff member have enough education to be able to share science discoveries, appreciation for art and music, children's literature, and other cultures with children? Also important is whether the staff member has adequate knowledge of children's development in order to plan appropriately to meet the everchanging needs of children in care. Staff education is critical to understanding and carrying out health and safety procedures with children.

"Clearly child care programs are not operating alone. Child care is simply part of the child's total milieu. Children do not live by child care alone—no matter how fitting its form or how fine its features."[v]

Virginia licensing regulations reduce the educational requirements for staff as experience increases. However, in research studies, staff experience alone was not found to contribute to the quality of the program. Years of experience without training or education may mean the staff person just continued doing the same things without improving over the years.[50]

In Virginia, licensing standards set minimum requirements for staff qualifications and annual training hours. The person in charge of a child care center must be at least 21 years old and have the equivalent of a high school diploma and three years' experience. The leader of a group of children (the teacher) is required to be at least 18 years old and have the equivalent of a high school diploma and six months' experience. Aides, who are fully counted in staff:child ratios, need only be 16 years old. No training or experience is required. Family day home providers need no training or experience. For some positions, annual training hours (typically eight clock hours per year) are required, but there are no limitations or quality controls on who can provide training or, except very generally, on the content of the training.

Vital Role of Parents—Quality programs are typically associated with strong parent involvement in the program. Those programs recognize that the parents and caregivers are partners who must collaborate and communicate for the sake of the child. The relationship is not one of a customer (the parent) buying services, but rather is much more personal and interactive. Especially where at-risk children were in care, studies found that significant parental involvement through home visits, class participation, and parent group meetings had the strongest positive results.[51]

"Parents cannot use child care arrangement[s] that they cannot afford."[w]

Child care is a necessity for most parents in the United States; millions of other parents who do not work choose early childhood programs for less than a work week because of the benefits to their children from group experiences. Early childhood programs build on the base of parents as the first teachers, but never seek to replace parents' roles with their child(ren).

While parents' involvement in their children's program is crucial, parents' roles precede their child's enrollment. Parents' choice of the program is an important first step, although, too often, a very difficult one. "In a short visit to a child care setting parents are considering, it is difficult for parents to observe the features of care that constitute quality and young children cannot be relied on to communicate whether their daily experiences in care are positive, neutral, or damaging. Methods that are more direct than consumer education are needed to improve the goal of child care options available to low income families."[52]

Choices parents make about child care arrangements are limited to options they know about. Most families rely on informal sources of information—friends, neighbors, relatives—to find child care and only half consider more than one option for choosing their main arrangement. Families leaving welfare often have no previous experience finding care and the friends and relatives they consult may also be unfamiliar with the challenge of arranging child care.[x]

Among the poor, cost is the most often cited constraint on child care choice. Proponents of parental choice must ask policy makers and business leaders to consider what can be done for parents who cannot afford high quality care on their own, as well as for those parents who can afford it but do not seek it because they are not aware of the difference it can make in their children's lives later on.[53]

Licensing and Accreditation

If quality early childhood programs are primarily a matter of sensitive relationships between teachers and children, with teachers who can knowledgeably meet children's needs and expand their horizons, what is the role of various attempts to regulate or codify these factors? Licensing seeks to set minimum standards for the good of all children. Accreditation represents a professional group's view of quality. Certainly government has a role in protecting vulnerable children in early childhood programs and has an economic interest in helping the early years be the best for its children.

"Regulation also promotes choice by making it possible for parents to know who is providing service and [by] giving parents access to information gathered by objective and knowledgeable inspectors. Society does not allow or expect parents to make such wide-open selections in other areas—e.g., from among unregulated health care providers, taxi-drivers, or hairdressers, or from among uninspected restaurants, food products, and elevators."[y]

"While parents must be the first line of defense in monitoring their children's care, it is essential that government play a supportive role as well. Studies have found, for example, that parents want and need help monitoring and evaluating the quality of care their children are receiving, as some issues are difficult for them to observe. For example, most parents are only able to see the program operating when they drop off and pick up their children, and cannot see what is happening during the day when they are at work."[54] Parents consistently report that they want basic consumer protections in place to help keep their children safe when they are in child care centers and family day care homes. Nationally, in an October 1997 *Parents Magazine* poll, 90% of parents responding said they supported regulation of the child care industry.[55] In Virginia, in a 1989 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) child care study, 76% of parents favored state regulation, 98% wanted inspections to address sufficient staffing, 82% wanted regulations to require training for providers, 99% wanted fire and health inspections, and 95% wanted screening for criminal records.[56]

Periodic inspections by licensing staff are one of the most important ways to ensure the safety and well-being of children in licensed child care programs, as the inspections allow licensers to detect unsafe situations such as safety risks, unsanitary practices, and too many children per adult for adequate supervision. Yet, according to a recent report by the Virginia JLARC, the state licensing office is not adequately staffed to complete the inspections of child care centers required by Virginia law. The JLARC reports that failing to complete the legally required inspection visits has the potential to place the health and safety of children at risk. It recommends that the department hire sufficient staff to ensure that it can at least conduct the two inspections (a year) required by law, as well as more frequent visits when warranted.[Z]

What is the appropriate level of licensing? Most agree that when child care programs comply with licensing regulations, they must meet a level of quality that will, at the very least, not be harmful to the development of young children.[57] Stronger licensing regulations are related to improvement in the participating children's intellectual, language, and social development and experiences. The data suggest that efforts to increase regulations will likely produce more developmentally beneficial child care environments for young children.[58] Regulation to minimum standards has not been shown to drive providers out of the marketplace in other states with stronger licensing laws.[59] "Stringent regulatory standards for child care centers and strict enforcement of these regulations were associated with higher quality care."[60] Quality in licensed centers has also been usually found to be higher than in licensed family day care homes, which are generally of higher quality than unregulated family day care. This has been found for such quality related measures as formal training of staff, ratios, staff training, staff turnover rates, job satisfaction (which is tied to turnover rates), amount of TV-watching by children, and overall measures of quality. On those measures, the unlicensed family day care homes rarely reached the minimal standards for health and safety of the children in care. Informational exchanges between caregivers and children and activities related to language development were two and three times more frequent in licensed centers than in unlicensed family day care.[61]

Formal child care arrangements are usually more reliable.[62] One of the problems of unregulated care is that parents do not have information about the program and staff. For example, in California, eight percent of providers (who do not otherwise have to be licensed but who must undergo a background check in order to care for children receiving child care subsidies) were found either to have criminal charges pending or to have criminal records, including such crimes as willful child cruelty, voluntary manslaughter, and sexual assault.[63]

Not nearly as widespread as licensing, accreditation points not to minimum standards, but to standards of quality. Widely recognized accreditation programs are the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC) and the National Association for Family Child Care Accreditation. The NAEYC accreditation standards were developed after an extensive process of study, expert consultation, and discussion. Research conducted across many settings and with different groups of children indicates that developmentally appropriate programs do promote better child development outcomes.[64] "To gain accreditation, a center must be inspected and meet a wide range of standards, including teacher training, adult supervision and a curriculum that encourages children's development. An accredited program is especially valuable in a state with poor standards for adult supervision and

caregiver training," according to *Working Mother* magazine. "Parents can rest easier knowing such a center meets NAEYC standards."[65] In January 1998, there were 187 NAEYC accredited centers in Virginia.[66]

The first large scale experiment with accreditation of family day care in the US led to very positive results for children and providers. Family day care providers typically report that becoming accredited increased their professionalism and self-esteem, helped them correct things they were doing wrong, developed their leadership skills, and increased the likelihood that they will remain in the field.[67] Accredited caregivers must gain approval in measures of health and safety, be rated as respectful and responsive to children, and offer appropriate activities. Such accreditation may be especially important in states like Virginia where there is no regulation of most family day care providers. Nineteen family day care homes in Virginia are accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care.[68]

Quality must be the starting point

Achieving quality care will take hard work . . .

Conclusion. Making quality early childhood programs available to every child in Virginia who needs or could benefit from such a program is a daunting goal. Yet, advocates must not retreat from the commitment to quality early childhood programs for every child. If we compromise at the beginning, if our goal is an inexpensive child care slot for every child, the children of the Commonwealth will never have the lifelong advantages of excellent early childhood care and education.

Neither should advocates be naive. Achieving quality care will take hard work, creative and resourceful analysis, diligent collaboration, and difficult choices. The Action Alliance's remaining three white papers will address issues related to bringing about quality programs. It is significant that the first paper is on quality—that, indeed, must be the starting point.

How do we start? Here are eight recommendations on how to improve quality care in Virginia. Which ones will you work on now?

1. Increase support from various public and private sectors for quality enhancements, especially including higher wages and benefits for providers;

2. Support accreditation of programs;

3. Support credentialling of individual caregivers;

4. Coordinate and streamline licensing regulations so that they are not unnecessarily complex or burdensome;

5. Support caregiver training, especially that which leads to degrees, or other clearly organized professional development programs;

6. Provide consumer education for parents to help them understand and find quality care that best suits their child(ren)'s needs;

7. Increase accountability to parents and other stakeholders; and

8. Seek ways to encourage idea of partnership between home and care and community.

ENDNOTES —

(Numbered references appear first; those indicated with lower-case letters appear after the numbers.)

1 Holcomb, B. Fifth annual survey. Child care: How does your state rate. *Working Mother*. July/August (1997). 22-46.

2 Adams, G. & Schulman, K. *Virginia: Child Care Challenges*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1998.

3 Simmons, T. & Sheehan, R. Brain research manifests importance of first years. Raleigh, NC: *The News and Observer*. February 16, 1997.

4 Governor Jim Hunt, remarks at the White House Conference on Child Care, October 23, 1997.

5 Gomby, D.S., Larner, M.B., Stevenson, C.S., Lewit, E.M., & Behrman, R.E. Long-term outcomes of early childhood programs: Analysis and recommendations. In Long-term outcomes of early childhood programs. *The Future of Children* (Winter 1995) 5.3:6-24.

6 Barnett, S. Long-term effects of early childhood programs on cognitive and social outcomes. In Long-term outcomes of early childhood programs. *The Future of Children* (Winter 1995) 5.3:25-50.

7 Entwisle, D.R. The role of schools in sustaining early childhood program benefits. Long-term outcomes of early childhood programs. *The Future of Children* (Winter 1995) 5.3:133-144.

8 Gomby, Larner, Stevenson, Lewit, & Behrman.

9 Phillips, D.A., Scarr, S., & McCartney, K. (1987). Dimensions and effects of child care quality: The Bermuda Study. In Phillips, D.A. (ed.), *Quality in Child Care: What Does Research Tell Us?* Research monograph of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, I. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 43-56.

10 Phillips, D.A. & Howes, C. (1987). Indicators of quality in child care: Review of research, pp. 1-19. Clarke-Stewart, K.A. (1987). Predicting child development from child care forms and features: The Chicago Study, pp. 21-41. Phillips, Scarr, McCartney. In Phillips, D.A. (ed.), *Quality in Child Care: What Does Research Tell Us?* Research monograph of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, I. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

11 Phillips & Howes.

12 Gomby, Larner, Stevenson, Lewit, & Behrman.

13 Phillips & Howes.

14 Entwisle.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team. (1995). Cost, quality, and child outcomes in child care centers: Public Report, second edition. Denver: University of Colorado Economics Department.

17 Phillips & Howes.

18 Phillips, Scarr, & McCartney.

19 Child Care Action Campaign. *Child Care Action News*, Jan.-Feb., 1998, Vol. 15, No. 1.

20 Yoshikawa, H. Long-term effects of early childhood programs on social outcomes and delinquency. In Long-Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs. *The Future of Children*, (Winter 1995) 5.3:51-114.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Barnett.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *National KIDS COUNT Data Book*. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998.

25 Kisker, E.E. & Ross, C.M. Arranging child care. In Welfare to work. *The Future of Children*, (Spring 1997) 7,1:99-109. Goelman, H. & Pence, A.R. (1987). Effects of child care, family and individual characteristics on children's language development: The Victoria day care research project. In D.A. Phillips (ed.), *Quality in Child Care: What Does Research Tell Us?* Research monograph of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, I. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 89-104.

26 Stoesz, D. & McDonald, S. The impact of welfare reform on families in Richmond, Virginia. Unpublished manuscript. Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work, 1997.

27 Goelman & Pence.

[28]Carnegie Corporation of New York. Years of promise: A comprehensive learning strategy for America's children. New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1996.

[29]Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team.

[30]Kisker & Ross.

[31]Adams & Schulman.

[32]Children's Defense Fund. Some common myths about child care. January 26, 1998. Washington, DC.

[33]Larner, M.B., Terman, D.L., & Behrman, R.E. Welfare to work: Analysis and recommendations. In Welfare to work. *The Future of Children*. (Spring 1997) 7,1:4-19.

[34]Child Care Action Campaign.

[35]Robert E. Campbell, Vice-Chairman, Johnson & Johnson, quoted in Galinsky, E. & Friedman, D.F. *Education before School: Investing in Quality Child Care*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1993.

[36]Galinsky & Friedman.

[37]Phillips, D.A. (1987). In Phillips, D.A. (ed.) *Quality in Child Care: What Does Research Tell Us?* Research monograph of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, I. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, preface.

[38]Phillips, Scarr, & McCartney.

[39]Sharon Lynn Kagan, remarks at the panel discussion following the national release of the 1998 *National KIDS COUNT Data Book*, May 5, 1998. Washington, DC.

[40]Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs. The regulations of child day programs: A study guide for citizens and advocates. Richmond, VA: Department of Social Services, 1993.

[41]Phillips & Howes.

[42]Children's Defense Fund. America's families need affordable quality child care. January 28, 1998. Washington, DC.

[43]Galinsky & Friedman.

[44]Frede, E.C. The role of program quality in producing early childhood program benefits. In Long-term outcomes of early childhood programs. *The Future of Children*. (Winter 1995) 5,3:115-132.

[45]Galinsky & Friedman.

[46]Frede.

[47]Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team.

[48]*National KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

[49]Phillips & Howes.

[50]Phillips, Scarr, & McCartney.

[51]Gomby, Larner, Stevenson, Lewit, & Behrman.

[52]Kisker & Ross.

[53]Child Care Action Campaign.

[54]Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team.

[55]Children's Defense Fund. Some common myths about child care. January 26, 1998.

[56]Virginia Department of Social Services.

[57]Kontos, S. & Fiene, R. (1987). Child care quality, compliance with regulations, and children's development: The Pennsylvania study, pp. 57-79. In Phillips, D.A. (ed.) *Quality in Child Care: What Does Research Tell Us?* Research monograph of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, I. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 57-79.

[58]Phillips, D.A., Howes, C., & Whitebook, M. (1992). The social policy context of child care: Effects on quality. *American Journal of Community Psychology,)* 20,1:25-51.

[59]Virginia Department of Social Services.

[60]Kisker & Ross.

[61]Goelman & Pence.

[62]Kisker & Ross.

[63]Report of the National Association of Child Advocates. February 27, 1998. Washington, DC.

[64]Frede.

[65]Holcomb.

[66]National Association for the Education of Young Children statistic, Washington, DC.

[67]Dombre, A.L. Child care aware: -A guide to promoting professional development in family child care: Lessons learned from child care aware sites. 1995.

[68]Holcomb.

[a] Virginia Department of Social Services.

[b] Internet website: www.usnews.com.

[c] Greene, Graham. *The Power and the Glory*. New York: Penguin, 1994.

[d] Gomby, Larner, Stevenson, Lewit, & Behrman.

[e] Virginia Department of Education. Superintendent's Report. Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education, 1996.

[f] *National KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

[g] Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team.

[h] 1997 *KIDS COUNT in Virginia* data book. Richmond, VA: Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth, 1998.

[i] Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Center website: www.vcu.edu/aelweb.

[j] Gomby, Larner, Stevenson, Lewit, & Behrman.

[k] Child Care Action Campaign.

[l] *Ibid*.

[m] *Ibid*.

[n] Police officials back spending on child care. Washington, DC: *The Washington Post*. February 6, 1998.

[o] Child Care Action Campaign.

[p] *1997 KIDS COUNT in Virginia* data book.

[q] *1998 National KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

[r] Barnett.

[s] Bureau of Labor Statistics (1995 estimates). Virginia Employment Commission, Richmond, VA.

[t] Children's Defense Fund. In press. 1998. Washington, DC.

[u] Virginia Department of Social Services.

[v] *National KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

[w] Clarke-Stewart.

[x] Kisker & Ross.

[y] Virginia Department of Social Services.

[z] Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission. Follow-up review of child day care in Virginia. House Document 5. Richmond, VA: Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 1998.

Action Alliance

for Virginia's Children & Youth

422 East Franklin Street, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219
Phone: 804-649-0184 FAX: 804-649-0184
E-mail: aavcy@erols.com or HN5071@handsnet.org